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KENNEDY, EDWARDS JOIN RALLY FOR FAIR MINIMUM WAGE

OVER ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND CITIZEN CO-SPONSORS OF KENNEDY'S LEGISLATION

Washington, D.C. – Today Senator Edward M. Kennedy and former Senator John Edwards celebrated the success of their month-long online initiative to recruit "Citizen Co-Sponsors" for the Senator Kennedy's Fair Minimum Wage Act. Over 100,000 Citizen Co-Sponsors signed a statement supporting Kennedy's Fair Minimum Wage Act and demanding a vote on the minimum wage as soon as possible. Over the past ten years, members of Congress have raised their own pay by \$31,000, but the minimum wage hasn't gone up a cent and remains more than \$6,000 below the poverty line for a family of three

"The issue resonates strongly with the people, because it's fundamentally about fairness. Americans understand fairness. They know the difference between right and wrong," Senator Kennedy said. "It's wrong that hard-working men and women can't afford to put food on the table or heat their homes. It's wrong to give billions upon billions of dollars in tax relief to the wealthy, and then but turn your back on the hard-working families who live in poverty each day. It is wrong that in our prosperous nation, 14 million children go to bed hungry each night."

Kennedy and Edwards were joined by hundreds of grassroots activists that have been inspired to join the minimum wage fight, and have witnessed firsthand the popular outcry for a raise in the minimum wage. Building on this groundswell of public activism, Senator Kennedy and Senator Edwards called on the Republican leadership for an immediate vote on Kennedy's bill to raise the minimum wage. Attached is a fact sheet on Kennedy's plan and his remarks as prepared for delivery.

Statement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy

Minimum Wage Rally

(AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY)

In 1776, the founders of our country set forth a bold vision of what our country should be. They declared our independence, because they wanted a nation that was ruled not by a king, but by the people. Today, however, we have an Administration in power that all too often ignores the will of the people and favors special interests, not the millions of hardworking families who are the backbone of America. Nothing illustrates that better than the refusal of the Administration and its rubber-stamp Congress to raise the minimum wage.

It's been nine long years since the minimum wage was last increased. It's been stuck at \$5.15 an hour since 1997.

The bill I favor would raise it to \$5.65 right away, \$6.75 a year from now, and \$7.25 two years from now.

Again and again, however, our Republican colleagues have refused to give minimum wage workers any raise at all, let alone the raise they deserve.

Shamefully, Congress has raised its own pay by \$31,000 in the past nine years, without providing a penny for minimum wage workers.

Congress and the White House are ignoring the issue, but the American people are not. They see their friends and neighbors struggling to get by, and they want to help. Across the nation, citizens are raising their voices to demand an increase. They agree that no one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

In a moment we'll hear from some of the citizens who have joined the battle in their own states. Nearly half the states have enacted increases for their own populations, and we're honored to be here with some of these activists this afternoon. It's their dedication that inspired Senator John Edwards and me to launch the citizen's campaign that we're here to celebrate today. We asked people to sign their names as citizen co-sponsors of the Fair Minimum Wage Act.

In the past month, the response has been overwhelming. Over 100,000 people have signed on to say that a fair increase in the minimum wage is long overdue.

The issue resonates strongly with the people, because it's fundamentally about fairness. Americans understand fairness. They know the difference between right and wrong.

- It's wrong that hard-working men and women can't afford to put food on the table or heat their homes.
- It's wrong to give billions upon billions of dollars in tax relief to the wealthy, and then but turn your back on the hard-working families who live in poverty each day.
- It is wrong that in our prosperous nation, 14 million children go to bed hungry each night.

I hope that each of you here today has signed on to show your support. If not, I invite you to do so now. And I ask you to sign your name as big as you can.

When the founders issued the Declaration of Independence, John Hancock signed it in very large letters. He said he did it so King George could read it without his glasses on.

So put your John Hancock on this petition in big letters, so King George in the White House can't miss it. They know November is coming at them, and they'll <u>have</u> to answer to the American people!

I promise each and every one of you I won't rest, I won't give up this fight until Congress finally raises the minimum wage.

RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE IS A MATTER OF FAIRNESS

□□□□□The Fair Minimum Wage Act would raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour in three steps
• 000000000\$5.85 60 days after enactment;
• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •
DDDDDDDDDD\$7.25 one year after that

• • • The number of Americans in poverty has increased by 5.3 million since President Bush took office. 37 million people live in poverty, including 13 million children. Among full-time, year-round

workers, poverty has doubled since the late 1970s. An unacceptably low minimum wage is a key part of the problem.
• □□□□□Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn \$10,700 a year, \$4,500 below the poverty line for a family of three. Since Congress last acted to raise the minimum wage in 1996, the value has eroded by 18 percent[S1] <#_msocom_1>.
• □□□□□Every day the minimum wage is not increased it continues to lose value, and workers fall farther and farther behind. Minimum wage workers have already lost all of the gains of the 1996-1997 increase.
• □□□□Today, the real value of the minimum wage is more than \$3.00 below what it was in 1968. To have the purchasing power it had in 1968, the minimum wage would have to be more than \$8.50 an hour today, not \$5.15.
• □□□□Seven and a half million workers will directly benefit from the minimum wage increase.
• □□□□Raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour will mean an additional \$4,370 a year to help minimum wage earners support their families. It would be enough money for a low-income family of three to buy:
• □□□□□□□□More than one year of groceries;
• DDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDD
• DDDDDDDDDA year and a half of heat and electricity; or
• □□□□□□□□□□full tuition for a community college degree.
• □□□□This year, the Senate raised its pay \$3,100. It is shameful that Members of Congress receive our seventh pay increase in nine years, yet in those same nine years, we have not provided a single pay increase to the lowest paid workers.
• □□□□□Salaries of lawmakers will have gone up by \$31,600 since 1997 while minimum wage workers continue to earn just \$10,700 a year.

passed, the economy experienced its strongest growth in over three decades. Nearly 11 million new jobs were added, at a pace of 232,000 per month. In contrast, since President Bush took office the minimum wage has held steady, but only 1.8 new million jobs have been created.
• □□□□□A fair increase is long overdue. Congress should act as quickly as possible to pass a minimum wage increase that reflects the losses suffered as the result of our shameful inaction in the past. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.
[S1] <#_msoanchor_1> CEPR Report, December 2005

History clearly shows that raising the minimum wage has not had any negative impact on jobs, employment, or inflation. In the four years after the last minimum wage increase